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PROGRESSIVE
PROTESTANTISM.



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PROGRESSIVE PROTESTANTISM.

ONE of the most interesting phenomena of modern Protestantism is the proposed revision of the Presbyterian creed. Any one who has studied the history of Protestant doctrine since the time of the Reformation must have been struck with the remarkable flexibility of Protestantism in adapting itself to peculiarities of nationality, differences of thought, and political forms. Churches which profess to be founded on the authority of the Bible have always showed ingenuity in extracting from the sacred books evidence of the truth of their own doctrines. And where private judgment could make no such interpretation, it has been customary for Protestants to deny the organic unity of the Bible. Some have regarded the Scriptures as a collection of pious literature, and have not hesitated to point out alleged discrepancies between different parts of the Bible. In the writings of many Protestant divines, we read of "Pauline," "Petrine," and "Johannine" doctrines, as if these were

opposing tendencies of theology. Teachers of a former day were content to demonstrate the truth of a Protestant doctrine by the citation of one or more texts taken from the Scriptures. It was argued that because the Bible is the Word of God, all its assertions are equally authoritative. But modern exegesis, not looking at the Bible as an organic unity, has appealed to the Higher Criticism. The statements of Scripture are now taken with a grain of salt; the salt being a critical survey of the circumstances under which each writing was composed, the people to whom it was addressed, and the relative importance of the author to whom any assertion may be attributed. Among many Protestants, the result has been that explicit statements of the Scriptures have been often doubted, and, instead of sitting at the feet of inspired authors, the Protestant is disposed to make himself the judge, not only of what the Word of God really is, but also of the credibility of what the Word of God teaches. It would appear to an unprejudiced observer that by following such a course the Protestant churches would necessarily have a great gain in membership. So long as men are bound by an inflexible authority like the historic Church, or the infallible Scriptures, the way is narrow, and few there be that find it. But when once

the authority of religion is regarded as subjective, and the private judgment acquires the right to criticise, as well as to interpret, every one may become in some sense a progressive Protestant, who repudiates, on the one hand, the claims of the Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, the claims of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme authority in matters of religion.

It appears, then, that the theology of the reformed communions may mean one of two things. It may mean reaction, or it may mean progress. Most of the earliest reformers thought that it meant reaction. Their idea was that the Catholic Church had been untrue to her ancient heritage, and, by her additions to Christian doctrine, to the pure faith of the apostolic age. To them the sources of Christian doctrine were the Holy Scriptures, and they measured the doctrines of the Latin Church by the standard of the Bible; interpreting the Bible, not in the light of Church councils and decrees, but according to the private judgment of the individual believer. Those who agreed as to what the Bible taught, formed separate churches or sects, and, in each case, founded their reactionary creeds on the infallibility of the Scriptures, which were regarded as the abiding organ of the Holy Ghost.

But the Reformation has a progressive as well as a reactionary side. Protestantism, which

was originally a revolt against one kind of authority in order to profess obedience to another, has at length revolted against all objective authority. It has sometimes become a system of philosophy, or a sentimental covenant. It accepts the Bible as a useful aid to devotion, as a valuable guide to human action, as a picture of prophets and saints and apostles; above all, as a presentation of the historic Christ, the divine example and teacher, the divine martyr. But it swears no allegiance to the Bible as a supreme authority in matters of faith. On the contrary, it declares the rights of the reason to be coequal or superior. Progressive Protestantism has been steadily advancing since the time of the Reformation. It has always been in conflict with reactionary Protestantism, as well as with the Church of Rome. It has often refused to be called "rationalism," for it has often admitted that the Bible contains a revelation from God. But as its supreme authority is not the Church, but the human consciousness and the human reason, it is, in its essence, rationalistic. It is grateful to reactionary Protestantism, because the latter has parted company with the Roman supremacy. But its dominant principle is not a return to the primitive Christian doctrine. In this respect it is in conflict with both Rome and Geneva. It would claim that it had

not put off the yoke of ecclesiastical authority in order to put on the yoke of scriptural control. It dislikes the scholasticism of the Reformation quite as much as it dislikes the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. If it condescends to admit that Moses taught what the Bible says that he did, and that Jesus lived, and taught, and died, and rose again, as the Bible affirms that He did, it desires to be at liberty to make the Reason arbiter in such matters, so that the new Christianity may be bound by no fetters which it has not forged for itself. The conflict between these two types of Protestantism is imminent—is even now in active progress. The issue has at length been sharply defined, and that it has been defined is proved by the assertion of high authorities in Protestant Churches that the Bible is no longer supreme. The statements of the Bible are regarded by these new apostles of Reformation as errant, or as relative in their truthfulness, just as the decrees of the Church were once regarded by contemporaries of Luther and Calvin and Knox. If this progressive party should prevail, the source of divine authority in religion would become, for Protestants, chiefly the human reason, while dogmatic theology would become only a branch of philosophy. Where the philosophy is naturalism, the ideas

of supernatural religion are being repudiated. Protestantism in the future will be split into a number of philosophical or sentimental sects; or the principle of toleration may be extended so far that Protestants may unite in one church, with a theistic or pantheistic creed and a reverence for the humanity of our blessed Lord, a belief in whose divinity will be no part of their doctrine. We do not affirm that this will be the actual result, but only that it will be the result if the progressive party triumphs in the orthodox churches.

Protestants have often pointed out the conflict which is still going on, and which the lapse of time may exaggerate, between the fixed decrees of Rome on the one hand, and the conclusions of progressive philosophy and science on the other. But the view taken of Rome must also be the view taken of reactionary Protestantism. If the faith of Rome is not so fixed as to abide during changes of thought and discovery, then the Church of Rome cannot hope to prevail against the gates of hell. If the Bible has not said the last word with respect to the fundamental doctrines of Protestantism, the claim of Protestantism to divine truth is as vain as the claim of Rome. Traditionalism, whether it be the traditionalism of the apostles conveyed in the New Testament, or that of the

Church retained and confirmed at the Vatican, has parted from its moorings, and the Catholic Church, with reactionary Protestantism drifting beside it, will soon disappear below the horizon of the past. The fulfillment of these hopeful prophecies of Rationalism will have been begun. That is a logical statement of the possibilities of the situation, in case men desert the principles of objective authority and assert that if God is revealed at all He is revealed as perfectly now in the consciousness of all the faithful as He was revealed in the apostolic age, or as He is still revealed in the councils of the Catholic Church.

Progressive Protestantism has done the Latin Church much temporary harm, just as it has temporarily imperiled the Protestantism of the Bible. This is especially apparent in the Catholic nations of the world. The spiritual as well as the temporal power of the Church has been seriously impaired in all the great Catholic nations of Europe. The religious as well as the political opinion of large classes in Italian society has been changed since the accession of the first modern king of Italy. The independent thought of the Italian universities, and the growth of skeptical societies among the people have brought the hierarchy into direct conflict with progressive Protestantism.

In Austria and Spain, where there has been no political revolution of a radical kind, the missionaries of the Protestant Bible have been too often replaced by the missionaries of Agnosticism and German infidelity. And no religious republican can look with complacency upon the ecclesiastical condition of France since the fall of the Empire. Catholics and Protestants alike have suffered. The traditions cherished by the Republic are those of the French Revolution, which are religious only because they stamp the three senseless words, "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*," on the walls of sacred buildings. Those who congratulate themselves that the decrees of Bismarck and the decrees of French ministries have destroyed forever the power of priestcraft, and have sent the successors of Loyola to the four quarters of the globe, may now look with some apprehension upon the starving churches of Germany, and find their amusement on holy days in reading blasphemous lampoons on the streets of Paris. The devout Protestant, who has looked with hopeful enthusiasm at the removal of "Romish idolatry," and has been pleased to find the provincial inhabitants of France and Germany turn from the worship of the Mass to the perusal of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, may comfort himself still further with the thought

that it is no longer Rome which snatches the Bible from the hands of the pious inquirer, but that his former friends and allies, the progressive Protestants, have begun to call the Bible an imperfect literature, and to deny that it is a divine authority. We are not defending a pessimistic view of the religious condition of Europe, but are rehearsing facts. Yet it may be well to notice the anomaly presented in northern Germany, where the Catholic churches are increasing, although a rationalistic gospel is preached in Protestant churches half filled with listless worshipers. It is not uncommon, however, for the representatives of progressive Protestantism to claim to be the true reactionists. They declare that the Catholic and Protestant scholastics have departed from the pure teaching of the Scriptures, and of the apostolic age. They affirm that later thought has grown like a noxious weed about the simple teaching and creeds of the earlier ages. It is their ideal, they say, to restore the Christianity of Christ without later dogmatic accretions, and to present to view the humanity of Jesus, His matchless teaching, stripped of mediæval dogma, and distinguished from Pauline theology, or the additions and developments of the apostolic Church. And claiming for themselves a more discriminating historic perception, they

describe the naturalistic growth of Jewish institutions. They present in symmetrical development the successive codes of Israel's history, and their reverent criticism exhibits the life and character of the Holy Redeemer in a "non-traditional" setting, stripped of the phantasmagoria of mysticism, Greek influence, Essenic superstition, and oriental subtlety. The Christ is indeed made the central figure of religious history, but all else is a slow and painful development from ignorance and superstition toward the truer apprehension of the light. They even promise a new era; an era when the dogmas, the mysteries, the childish fancies, the cold formality of the past shall be dissipated in the coming of a new and brighter day. Christianity shall be revived by the administration of the primitive gospel as it was once taught in Palestine, as it is interpreted, not by fanatical and partisan apostles and fathers, not by monastic theologians, but by the new apostles of science and history—by archæologists, literary critics, and philanthropists. This, we are told, is the new and true Reformation. Christianity is a life, not a dogma, nor a system, nor a ritual. And so they return to the Bible, only to discredit its infallible authority. They approach so near the Son of Mary that they fail to discern through His humanity the eternal

power and godhead. Their historical insight has brought them so fully into acquaintance with the conceptions of early ages, that apostolic testimony is to be accepted only after cross-examination by enemies of the apostles; while the narratives of the holy gospels are discounted by hypotheses which are to replace the effete symbols of the Catholic Faith.

In proportion as later developments of Christianity seem unsatisfactory, in proportion as the religious ideas of the priests and prophets and apostles of the Scriptures are given up as unethic and untrue, there is a tendency to attach a higher value to non-Christian or anti-Christian thought. What their Higher Criticism reveals negatively, their Science of Religion reveals positively. Unsuspected beauty surrounds, for them, the morality of pagan writers. Distrust of Moses, and of the Psalter, and of the rugged prophets of Israel prepares the way for ecstatic admiration of Pythagoras and Socrates. A part of the gospel's radiance is found to be a reflection of lights which have burned on the pagan altars of Plato and Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Those who display sentimental emotion at the heroism of Christian missionaries in Asia dwell also with delight upon the remarkable purity of Gautama's ethics, and upon the inspired nobil-

ity of the maxims of Confucius. The religion of Jesus is not profaned, but the religions of the pagan world are glorified. It is claimed that the narrowness of mediæval Christianity has been partially superseded by a Christianity which is only one episode in the numerous episodes of the religion of seers and prophets the broad world over; and that if, on the one hand, we should teach the precepts of Jesus to the lands beyond the Euphrates, we should, on the other hand, paint an aureole about the heads of men who have known nothing of Eden, and Sinai, and Bethlehem and Calvary. It is implied that religion, like art, may have flourished more perfectly in Europe than in the less favored continents, but that religion, like oriental porcelain, or oriental fabrics, or oriental carvings, may be imported with advantage, and that lessons of justice may be learned even in a Mohammedan mosque, or in a Buddhist temple. If we were asked to describe the true antichrist, the most subtle foe to the Christianity of Jesus Christ, we should point to the tendency which has just been noticed. It might easily be demonstrated, upon the principles of progressive Protestantism, that only a revival of polytheism and its cult is needed to transform the world of progressive Protestantism into a heathen world. Men will be free to

call the crusades "useless bloodshed," to say that the bruises upon the feet of Christian pilgrims have been a due reward for their fanaticism, to fasten the Crescent upon the twin spire with the Cross, to exalt the reason of man into the place of God, and to let the emotions dictate the method in which the Almighty, if there be an Almighty, is to be worshiped.

It is not our purpose to defend the position of either party in this war of Protestant churches. It is claimed by both parties that it is desirable that there should be a religion of some sort. Indeed, the reason given for the activity of progressive Protestantism is that religion may be made more attractive, and may advance to universal dominion. What we do claim, however, is that if there be a religion at all, it must be a religion founded on authority, upon authority which is objective and infallible. If there be no such religion, then there is no religion worthy of the name. Instead, there is the conflict of philosophical systems, the war of opposing sentiments, and the divergence of contrary tastes. The watchwords of progressive Protestantism are not the Holy Bible, nor the Holy Catholic Church, but Christian Conscience, and the Religious Feeling.

For where it is not explicitly asserted, it is implied, that Reason has something in store for

men, even if objective authority be given up. Human Reason has learned its lesson from the religions which have gone before. Vaguely in many minds arise ideas of a golden age such as is predicted in the words of Lessing: "*Sie wird gewiss kommen, die Zeit eines neuen ewigen Evangeliums, die uns selbst in den Elementar buechern des Neuen Bundes versprochen wird.*" * Human Reason now has a lesson of its own to teach. Rational theology in the guise of philosophy, and scientific doctrine have been clamoring long for admission to the Church, pleading that the old may be replaced by the new. Men may miss here and there the shibboleths of the old theology, and some of the dusty panes of cathedral glass may be broken that the white glare of secular light may shine in more readily. Philosophy, which has so often been hostile to Christianity, is now willing to become an ally, provided that Christianity will surrender. Or, if there be no complete surrender, some of the old outposts may be deserted, and some of the ancient fortresses may be dismantled. "We have undermined the breastworks of traditionalism; let us blow them to atoms." † And so, if the mystery of the Trinity disappear

* *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, 83.

† Inaugural Address, by C. A. Briggs, p. 41.

in the receding mists of scholastic thought, and the divinity of Jesus be a term to describe only His moral superiority to other men, then philosophy has a newer and sublimer doctrine of God, and a doctrine of sin which regards it as a temporary disease. Men will find in the character of Jesus only a suggestion of that sovereign ideal which is to become more and more perfect as the years roll by. Christianity has supplanted Judaism, but it must now give place to a yet higher system. The twilight of the dawn is past; we are on the way toward eternal noon. The ladder by which we have climbed so successfully may now be thrown down, and we may begin the ascent by other and stronger means. The doctrines proclaimed dogmatically by Jesus Christ are in some cases discarded, but more often are interpreted in terms of social and natural science. The time has come when men, having heard the sound of the wind, can "tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth," so that regeneration is found to be the regulation of a disordered body to be accomplished by healing the disorder through social and civil legislation. We need a little more of the blue sky of the old Greek world, or a little more attention to the care of the diseased, the insane, the pauper. Texts of Holy Scripture are deftly turned to meet the

demands of a secularized church. It is not Jesus Christ which is our righteousness, but the "social organism" which is working out its own salvation with swelling hopes. The heaven to be longed for is *bien être* in time, and the hell to be avoided is the asylum and the prison. That is the logical consequence of the optimism of progressive Protestantism. It is not the doctrine of philosophy. Philosophy, as distinguished from sentiment and groundless hope, has no gospel to proclaim to the world. It has theistic arguments to prove the existence of a "Great First Cause," but has no word to say of a Heavenly Father. It tells the old story of original and inherited sin, and admits a consciousness of guilt, but it has no Incarnate Redeemer, who is to bear the sins of men. Its teaching does not reach so far as to surmount those dark summits which separate the life here from the life beyond. And when Christianity has denied the godhead of its Saviour, and has declared the records of its origin to be idle myths, philosophy sits calmly in its judgment seat, and admits that it has no substitute to offer. When, then, it is affirmed that there is a residuum of truth which will cure the souls of men, even if the authority of the Church or the Bible be given up, true philosophy is silent, for if it

spoke the truth, the truth would be a gospel of despair.

Progressive Protestantism appears in a two-fold attitude. It professes, on the one hand, to be a revival of Christianity in its purity, by ignoring the growth of dogma during and since the apostolic age. And it professes, on the other hand, to be the religion of the future, because, it declares, it is in harmony with science.

To the Christian apologist it says: "You are behind the times. Away with these traditional doctrines which savor of the Middle Ages, and of the scholastic period of Protestantism!" To the Christian dogmatician it says: "Return to the Christianity of Christ, and reject these growths; we need the doctrine of Jesus, and you have given us the doctrine of Peter and of Paul." And the undevout man, who does not wish to be "behind the times," is persuaded that there is a new gospel for him in the immediate future; while the devout man, led by the sophistry which puts the teaching of Christ in antithesis to that of Paul and Peter, closes the New Testament at the end of the fourth, sometimes of the third, gospel, and declares that he has learned his lesson. From Jesus Christ he has learned a lesson of humility, of forgiveness, of self-denial, of faith, of justice and holiness; he has learned to know the humanity of

Jesus, and, if his critic will permit it, he has been filled with a holy exultation that Jesus has risen from the dead, and has ascended into heaven. But he has missed that complementary doctrine of the inspired apostles which the power of the Holy Ghost bestowed. He must discover by speculation or inference what sin is, and he must prove, by some principle of his own reason, that it behooved Christ to suffer, and to hang in mortal agony upon a cross.

For if the Bible be closed before the apostolic writings are completed, there is an obscurity about the life and death of Jesus which no philosophy can lighten. On the other hand, if the doctrines of Peter and of Paul be detached from the gospels, Christianity, as taught by the apostles, is inexplicable. But the Christian dogmatician is not called upon to choose which he will give up, the gospels or the epistles. If he were called upon to make the choice he would be obliged to say: "I can make no choice, for if I give up either, I must give up the Christ of Christianity or the Christianity of Christ. He is not in the gospels alone, nor in the epistles alone; He is in both, and if the one be taken away the other is inexplicable."

It is probable that those familiar with much of the Protestant literature of our time will admit the description which we have given

to be a faithful description. The ideas of progressive Protestantism are to be found everywhere. They are presented with more or less emphasis in Protestant schools of theology in America; they are frequently proclaimed from the pulpits of our great cities; they are followed with remorseless logic by theological specialists at almost every university on the continent of Europe; they have invaded with surprising success the conservative precincts of the University of Oxford. It is not with the results thus far reached that we are concerned; it is, rather, the principle of the tendency, or the tendency of the principle, to which we have wished to direct attention. We do not pretend that the world is in danger because of this tendency; but we do contend that Christianity, which at one time assumed to be the only method of the world's salvation, is threatened—we mean not the Christianity of secularized churches, but the Christianity of the Catholic Church.

In the midst of this development and drift of Protestant thought, one of the largest, most intellectual and most earnest of Protestant denominations, after some discussion, and after fierce misgivings and opposition on the part of a minority, has concluded to change its

creed. Holding the creed to which it now subscribes, it has grown with almost incredible rapidity, especially during the latter part of this century. We do not know whether or not this growth has been in spite of its creed, or on account of its creed. We had always supposed that their peculiar creed was the especial pride of Presbyterians, but if the growth has been in spite of the creed, then we are at a loss to explain why those who have joined the denomination should not have gone into one of the other numerous religious bodies, in which every affirmation and every negation known to theological science is to be found. The Presbyterian Church of the United States has decided, through its authoritative legislature, that its standards, which have been held up before the world since the seventeenth century, should be recast. Indeed, a large number of the clergy are of the opinion that more radical measures are needed, and that the standards should be abandoned. They are a historical monument of some interest, so they claim; but they are altogether insufficient for the present and the future. They are no longer defensible. The proposition has been not simply to add articles to the standards of belief formulating more distinctly the doctrines which have been professed. The proposition has been to alter the original doc-

trines for reasons which we shall presently have occasion to notice. Before doing so, it will be instructive to examine a curious little pamphlet published by a few Presbyterian ministers of New York when the discussion of the subject was well under way.

The authors of all the papers in this "bundle" are members of the Presbytery of New York, with the exception of the Rev. Dr. Llewelyn Evans, a professor at Cincinnati, the rhetorical glory of whose writing will command our attention in another place. While the Presbytery of New York may not be the most important of all the presbyteries, it is probable that the views of its members with respect to Revision are fairly representative of the opinions of the Presbyterian Church. No less than three of these papers are by the now famous Professor Briggs, and from statements of his we may infer with what great hopes the progressive Protestants of the Presbyterian Church approached the execution of the task set before them. He declares that the tendency towards Revision "has spread like fire upon a prairie, and now the whole church is ablaze. It is one of those movements that are long preparing, and that suddenly burst forth with irresistible might and omnipotent energy. We are in the beginnings of a theological reformation that can

be no more resisted than the flow of a great river." *

"It is a great step toward a better future. It is a preparation for a new reformation of the church. It is in the direction of Christian harmony, catholicity and unity. Jesus Christ is at the head of this movement; we shall do well if, with open minds and hearts, we look for His word and follow faithfully His call." *

The Rev. Dr. Parkhurst, a New York pastor, seems also to have had high hopes of this new movement. According to him: "It is not a Presbyterian controversy at all, but the local manifestation of a struggle that virtually ranges among the combatants every man in or out of the Presbyterian or any other church who has an interest," etc. . . . "Every man is essentially a little theologian." *

Such assertions as these must arouse the curiosity of the most indifferent, and the question is an interesting one: What kind of Revision is proposed? Has the Presbyterian Church been wrong for this immense æon of two hundred and fifty years in adhering to the conclusions of Westminster divines? The revisionists answer this question in the affirmative. The church which once professed to be founded on divine authority, upon infallible

* "How to Revise: A Bundle of Papers."

authority—the authority of the Word of God—finds that it has misunderstood the infallible rule of authority, after all. The old creed must be patched and repaired. After another two hundred and fifty years it will doubtless require renewed attention. Some trifling doctrine will have to be lopped off, some fresh invention of some energetic presbyter will probably be added; and when the Day of Judgment arrives, the unsettled faith of Protestantism will be refreshed by a clearer vision. The stumbling endeavors of successive generations of Presbyterians will, perhaps, be forgiven. Of course, that does not make a Presbyterian very comfortable about his religious faith, but he no doubt believes that he will be judged according to the creed up to the date of its latest Revision. Such difficulties do not disturb the minds of these prophets of a new reformation. Why should they disturb any one? The faith once delivered unto the saints is progressive, and our eyes should be fixed on the future. What parturition of theological mountains is this which we are called upon to witness, and what extraordinary tidings have been pronounced by these heralds of the new birth?

Professor Briggs, whose chequered career in the Presbyterian Church has been a puzzle to

both his friends and his foes, was, strangely enough, a leader of the majority of the Presbyterian Church in the year 1890. From him and from others among the authors of the "Bundle of Papers," we gain some knowledge of the reasons for Revision, and from the utterances of Presbyterians elsewhere we shall presently be able to state generally the motives which led to the lighting of this prairie fire. We learn that the Westminster Standards were composed by incompetent men. They are no longer accepted by the Presbyterian Church, so that no one need adhere to its doctrines. Yet, strange to say, the source of all the difficulties in the Presbyterian Church is that the dogmatic theologians, especially in America, have drifted away from the position occupied by the Westminster divines, who were incompetent.* The standards, which at the outset were unsatisfactory, are made, by this drifting away from them, still more unsatisfactory. That is surely a most forcible argument. Professor Briggs prepared a table showing how the doctrines of the Westminster Confession had been misrepresented by American dogmatic theologians. He carefully counted the pages devoted to various theological subjects, first in the Confession of Faith, and then in the works of dogmatic theo-

* See Prof. Briggs in "How to Revise."

logians, and found that in the works of Professors Hodge, Smith, and Shedd, more pages were given to some subjects than were given to others which Professor Briggs regarded as of equal importance. He protested against this. It is an error, however, which one is accustomed to observe in many carelessly constructed works of literature. The paradigm of the verb "to be," in most grammars, covers more pages than the alphabet. The list of the descendants of Noah is longer than the Lord's Prayer; *Bancroft's History of The United States* is longer than the Declaration of Independence; Professor Briggs's *Whither ?* is longer than the Sermon on the Mount. Having shown in this quantitative manner that the dogmatic theology of Presbyterians was disproportionately constructed, he proceeded next to show that modern doctrines had advanced beyond the doctrines of the Confession. It is instructive to learn that this so-called advance has been admitted by theologians who always have had before them the Word of God, and the deliverances of eminent churchmen since the apostolic times. Now it is perfectly easy to understand the position of any one who holds that religion, like science, must be changing every moment. But what is known in the Presbyterian Church as the learning of Professor Briggs has led him

into some extraordinary statements. For example, he affirms in his contribution to the "bundle" that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity contained in the Confession of Faith is defective, because the Arian controversies of the eighteenth century occurred subsequently to the framing of the Confession, although the same objection might be brought against the Athanasian Creed; and the chief Arian controversy took place before the Westminster divines assembled in the Jerusalem Chamber. Besides this, we are told that the Westminster divines presented a defective doctrine of Man, owing to their unfamiliarity with the writings of Descartes and Hobbes. We should be grateful for information as to the way in which the opinions of Descartes and Hobbes might have shed light on the Christian doctrine of Man. And if Professor Briggs, in his studies concerning the metaphysical categories, for which he has become famous in Aristotelian circles, had taken the slightest pains to inform himself about the history of modern philosophy, he would have discovered that if the Westminster divines had sat at the feet of Hobbes they would have rejected the doctrines of Descartes; that the conflict at the close of the seventeenth century was, above all things, a conflict between Cartesianism and the theories of Hobbes, and

that, aside from this, hardly an apologist for Christianity in the period after Hobbes's *Leviathan* appeared, was content to publish a work of any kind without attacking, in one way or another, the views of that English philosopher.

A man need not have knowledge of this kind to teach Biblical theology, nor, possibly, to lead this wonderful revolution in revising this ancient creed, but by some it may be regarded as not altogether indispensable to those who instruct their Protestant brethren concerning Protestant philosophy.

These are only one or two of the objections of Professor Briggs. They doubtless refer to sins of omission. But the sins of commission are those on which the authors of the "bundle" delight to dwell. We shall speak of them again, but it is hardly necessary to say that these sins are to be found in the doctrine of the divine decrees, and in the doctrine of the salvation of heathen and children. We should be glad to know whether it is true that these doctrines are still taught in the Presbyterian Church—the Sovereignty of God, the doctrine that infants are saved because they are elect, the doctrine that the whole heathen world is lying in wickedness, and will not be saved unless it should be converted. From the impetuous indignation of many of the revisers, one

might suppose that every Foreign Missionary society was an association for the damnation of the heathen; that every baptismal service raised doubts in the minds of parents as to whether their children were elect, and that modern thought had advanced so far, having overthrown the doctrines of causation and the uniformity of nature, that the Christian world was bound to become Pelagian or Arminian in sheer self-defence.

With respect to many of the doctrines of the Confession of Faith, we are told that the Presbyterian denomination has changed its attitude. According to Presbyterians, it now seems to be the object of the creed, and its most important function, to follow the independent opinions of those who subscribe to it. It is no longer a standard of doctrine, but the opinions of the subscribers seem to be the standard of the Church's creed. It might be well for the General Assembly to appoint a committee to represent the standards, which should every year subscribe to whatever might be taught in any of the Presbyterian churches. In many churches a change of attitude toward a creed is called heresy; in the Presbyterian Church it is only the creed which seems capable of committing heresy. This gives us a new insight into the constitution of Protestant denominations. It

must therefore have sounded quite natural to the Presbyterians to hear one of the clergymen, who had solemnly subscribed to the Westminster Confession, say: "The Westminster divines did not know what they were about when they framed these definitions." * This, we submit, places the Presbyterian revisers in a most ludicrous position.

As for the so-called doctrine of decrees, which involves the historic question as to predestination, it may be said that a belief in a positive form of this doctrine has always been distinctive of the Presbyterian Church. In the Catholic Church, the issue has been much debated, and considerable latitude has been allowed. The doctrines of SS. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have been opposed by many distinguished theologians within the fold of Rome, and concessions have been made on both sides. In the Church of England, the "high mystery" of Predestination referred to in the Thirty-nine Articles has been so high that it has been attacked by almost all the prominent Anglican theologians since the time of Laud. The Presbyterian Church has, however, always taught in its standards a most rigorous form of the doctrine. And now the advocates of Revision are disturbed by this ex-

* Prof. Briggs in "How to Revise."

treme Calvinism. This surrender is called for on many accounts. A paper in the "bundle," by the Rev. Dr. Vincent, throws some light on the reasons for this. He founds his objection to the doctrine on an exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans.*

This epistle has been known to Presbyterians since the time of the Reformation, and the exegesis of Dr. Vincent has been for centuries the accepted exegesis of all the Pelagian and Arminian churches. If it is the ideas of Dr. Vincent which have been running like wild-fire through the Presbyterian Church, then we present our congratulations to our Methodist brethren. Any Franciscan or Jesuit commentary would have told the Westminster divines what Dr. Vincent presents as something so startling as to call for a change in the standards to which he has subscribed. Men who take such a view of their ecclesiastical obligations as to remain Arminians after subscribing to a Calvinistic creed, are, we say it deliberately, no examples of ecclesiastical honesty. It is as if a Catholic priest were to deny the decrees of Trent and demand their repeal, because, although he had vowed allegiance to Tridentine doctrine, he preferred the "progressive" decrees of the Synod of Dort. The Catholic Church may be congratulated that its

* Prof. Vincent in "How to Revise."

priests have not adopted this practice of Protestant ministers.

This aspect of the Revision question was presented with still greater distinctness during the meeting of the General Assembly of 1890. It was at this meeting that the Presbyterian Church consented, at last, to undertake Revision. A large part of the debate was on a constitutional question, as to the method in which it should be carried out. It was, however, decided that Revision should be undertaken, and a committee was appointed to report such Revisions as they saw fit to recommend to the next General Assembly, in 1891. President Patton, one of the members of this committee, was at first a radical foe to Revision, but, apparently convinced that his church had made up its mind on the subject, he at last acquiesced, and endeavored to prevent radical changes in the standards. He carried his point with great skill, and the General Assembly ordered that no Revision should interfere with the Calvinistic doctrine of the Confession. It seems rather strange that the General Assembly should have assented to this *proviso*; for the preliminary discussions showed serious objections on the part of some to the clauses of the Confession dealing with the divine decrees, election, elect in-

fants, reprobation and other Calvinistic doctrines.

The most plausible explanation is that a large number of those at the Assembly had no knowledge of what was meant by Calvinism. It has been almost laughable to find so many of those who subscribe to that Calvinistic confession recoiling with horror from the harsh and unscriptural doctrines of their own standards. One may thus be forgiven for asking how it is that so many honest men have entered so ignorantly this Calvinistic Church. Is it the custom of the Protestant clergy to take promises with a mental reservation? Professor Morris, of Lane Seminary, seems to think so, for that is one of his reasons for desiring revision:

“It is true that there will be less of what is called mental reservation, or an adoption with exceptions publicly or privately made, for the simple reason that the revision will take away very largely, if not entirely, the need of such reserved or exceptional allegiance.”*

We were under the impression that this was a mark, *generis Diaboli*, of the Jesuits. It is evident from Professor Morris's argument that Revision is desirable to prevent false promises being made by the younger clergy. Surely the

* “A Friendly Talk about Revision,” by Edward D. Morris, p. 76.

emoluments of a Presbyterian pastor or professor, the ornate service of the Presbyterian Church can not be so seductive as to induce a Christian gentleman to sacrifice his intellectual honesty in order to avail himself of them.

After the adjournment of the General Assembly of 1890, the committee began its labors, and the discussion of Revision was continued in the Presbyterian press. Those Presbyterians who were in favor of Revision soon classified themselves, or were classified, as moderate and radical revisionists. It would be difficult to distinguish one of these classes with absolute accuracy from the other. The former may be said to have desired to modify the "Calvinism" of the Confession, the latter to "decalvinize" the Confession (to quote a term employed by President Patton). But some of the radicals wished to do away with the Confession, and to make a new and shorter creed, which would permit greater latitude of belief, and would be easily comprehended by ignorant and weak-minded people. The radical revisers were somewhat perplexed to know whether they had encountered a defeat or won a victory. On the one hand, the General Assembly had consented to Revision; on the other hand, through President Patton's influence, the attempt to "decalvinize" the Confession had been unsuc-

cessful. At all events, the task of the committee was a peculiar one. They must revise; but they must revise without interfering with the Calvinism of the Confession. In that case, what was there to revise? Was it for this that Professor Briggs had predicted the grand revolutionary movement, and that Arminian Presbyterians here and there had wailed piteously about the harsh and unscriptural doctrines of the Epistle to the Romans? was it for this that Professor Vincent had consulted Semi-Pelagian authorities, and was it with this that the religious feeling of the nineteenth century was to be satisfied?

Still, without dealing with the essential doctrines of Calvin, there were certain objectionable passages in the Confession, utterly out of place in a nineteenth-century church. It must be granted, for example, that the Pope was not Antichrist. The "clear-headed"* young Methodists and Universalists, who had been waiting on the threshold of the Presbyterian Church for the modification of the doctrines of God's sovereignty, and future retribution, would laugh in their sleeves to see such a clause retained. That might have done very well in days when priests were burning English Bibles, and putting men to torture for condemning the sale of in-

* See debate on "Revision," General Assembly, 1890.

dulgences. But in this enlightened age, when Protestants are proclaiming that one of the barriers to the advance of religion is Bibliolatry and the belief that the Word of God is infallible, these "clear-headed" young men might be tempted to claim that there were two Antichrists instead of one. The "Papists" of the fifteenth century had burned the English Bible: the Protestants of the nineteenth century were beginning to throw portions of the Hebrew Bible into the waste-basket. It was, surely, no time for hurling epithets at Rome. It may have been thought, however, that just as the revisers were anxious to lure clear-headed young men from other Protestant churches into the Presbyterian fold, so clear-headed young men from the Jesuit colleges, seeing the change in the Confession, might hasten to the charitable embrace of this Church with a brand-new creed.

The following reasons seem to have induced the Presbyterian Church to undertake Revision:

I. In the first place, it was held that the Confession of Faith must be modernized, in order to meet the wants of the nineteenth century. The Standards were found to be "out of date" in many particulars. It can be very plausibly urged that dogma must change just as scientific doctrine must change; that theology must be

amended just as astronomy must be amended, and that St. Paul, for example, must soon share the fate of Ptolemæus. From this point of view religion has a different basis for every period marked upon the dial-plate of time. The religion of the nineteenth century must necessarily be further advanced than that of the eighteenth, just as the science of the nineteenth century is further advanced than that of the eighteenth. Religious progress is to be measured, therefore, by the calendar of the years. The fallacy of this reasoning is apparent, unless one is prepared to give up faith in the supernatural origin of Christianity and the divine inspiration of Jesus and the apostles. If not, then one must follow this reasoning to its legitimate conclusions: The third century, when the doctrine of the Christian Church was corrupted by Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism and Paganism, was better than the apostolic age: the dark ages, between the patristic and scholastic periods, were in advance of the teaching of the Fathers. In other words, the farther one is removed in time from the divine life and teaching of Jesus, and the doctrine of His inspired apostles, the nearer one approaches the goal of true religion. And when one inquires in what respect the nineteenth century is in a better theological condition than

the eighteenth was, the answer made is, that old dogmas have been destroyed, that superstition has passed away, that the love of God is more generally understood, and that the authority of the Reason is more clearly recognized. Attention is called to the remarkable scholarship which has dissipated old ideas of inspiration, and of the truthfulness of God's revelation to man. Like a child which has knocked down his playmate's house of cards, these progressive Protestants laugh and crow at the destruction which they suppose they have accomplished. What is taught in their pulpits and theological seminaries can with difficulty be distinguished, in many cases, from the vulgar rhetoric of the atheistic orator. And they blow a trumpet before them when they revive some ancient theory of infidelity, as if they had made a contribution to the truth of God. We leave it to the Christian consciousness of these perverted teachers to invent their answer, which must be made before the judgment seat of Christ, and are satisfied to exhibit their position in their own words. Possibly, the childish sensation of naughtiness at having done mischief, of having violated their solemn vows, may recompense them for having denied the faith, and for having awakened baseless doubts in the minds of those who have to

meet the responsibilities of life, and the final issues of death.

"It gives me immense pleasure to say to this audience that orthodox religion is dying out of the civilized world. It is a sick man. . . . So these schools, and these theories, and these religions die hard. What else can they do? Like the paintings of the old masters, they are kept alive because so much money has been invested in them. Think of the amount of money that has been invested in superstition. . . . Orthodoxy dies hard, and its defenders tell us that this fact shows that it is of divine origin. . . . Let me whisper in all your ears: Infidelity is not dying—it is growing—it increases every day. And what does that prove? It proves that the people are learning more and more, that they are advancing, that the mind is getting free, and that the race is being civilized."—*Orthodoxy*, by R. G. Ingersoll, p. 1.

"Criticism is at work with fire and knife. Let us cut down everything that is dead and harmful, every kind of dead orthodoxy, every species of effete ecclesiasticism, all mere formal morality, all those dry and brittle fences that constitute denominationalism, and are the barriers of Christian unity."—*Inaugural Address*, by C. A. Briggs, p. 67.

"Here, in the citadel of the Bible, two hosts confront the most sacred things of our religion—the one, the defenders of traditionalism, trembling for the ark of God; the other, the critics, a victorious army, determined to capture all its sacred treasures, and to enjoy all its heavenly glories."—*Inaugural Address*, by C. A. Briggs, p. 41.

"The Reason, also, has its rights, its place and importance in the economy of Redemption. I rejoice at the age of Rationalism, with all its wonderful achievements in philosophy.

I look upon it as preparing men to use their reason in the last great age of the world."—*Inaugural Address, by C. A. Briggs, p. 65.*

Leaving out of view the fact that the nineteenth-century view of the Pentateuch, which contradicts the word of Jesus Christ as to the authorship of the Books of Moses, was presented by a Jew, Aben-Ezra, in the twelfth century, and substantially adopted by Spinoza in the seventeenth century,* we may notice the agreement of these Presbyterian critics with the conclusion of their contemporary scholar.

"The first five books in our Bible are known as the Pentateuch. For a long time it was supposed that Moses was the author, and among the ignorant the supposition still prevails. As a matter of fact, it seems to be well settled that Moses had nothing to do with these books, and that they were not written until he had been in dust and ashes for hundreds of years. But as all the churches still insist that he was the author, that he wrote even an account of his own death and burial, let us speak of him as though these books were, in fact, written by him. As the Christians maintain that God was the real author, it makes but little difference whom He employed as His pen or clerk."—*Mistakes of Moses, by R. G. Ingersoll, p. 46.*

But progressive Protestantism has accomplished more than the infidelity of Judaism ventured to claim, and more than the platform

* Spinoza: Tract. Theol. pol. c. viii.

orator has expressly affirmed or denied, with respect to authenticity:

“It may be regarded as the certain result of the science of the Higher Criticism that Moses did not write the Pentateuch or Job; Ezra did not write the Chronicles, Ezra, or Nehemiah; Jeremiah did not write the Kings or Lamentations; David did not write the Psalter, but only a few of the Psalms; Solomon did not write the Song of Songs or Ecclesiastes, and only a portion of the Proverbs; Isaiah did not write half of the book which bears his name. The great mass of the Old Testament was written by authors whose names or connection with their writings are lost in oblivion. If this is destroying the Bible, the Bible is destroyed already.”—*Inaugural Address, by C. A. Briggs, p. 33.*

And in a foot-note of a work edited by the same author, from the pen of Dr. Pusey's successor at Oxford, we read, as if the author wished to apologize for the fallibility ascribed to our Lord:

“It does not seem requisite for the present purpose, as indeed within the limits of a preface it would not be possible to consider whether our Lord, as a man, possessed all knowledge, or whether a limitation in this, as in other respects—though not, of course, of such a kind as to render Him fallible as a teacher—was involved in that gracious act of condescension, in virtue of which he was willing ‘in all things to be made like unto His brethren.’”—*An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, by Driver, p. xiv.*

Fortunately, the determination of the falli-

bility or infallibility of Jesus Christ is not dependent upon the expansion of a foot-note by an Anglican essayist ; and the citation of a text from the Epistle to the Hebrews in support of such a view of the incarnation would result logically in the affirmation that the Holy Jesus, like unto His brethren, was a sharer in human sin. But progressive Protestantism has spoken through another writer, a Presbyterian in name, but, apparently, unwilling to do more than insinuate that what our Lord said of the Pentateuch was not true. For ourselves, we prefer the wounds inflicted by an honest enemy to the kisses bestowed by unfaithful friends of Jesus Christ:

“ If, then, it would be a mistake, nay, as we now see, a mistake bordering on blasphemy (see Matt. xvi. 23), to pronounce antecedently against an incarnate revelation of God, subject to the limitations of weakness, of ignorance, of bondage, to the contractions and detractions of that ineffable Kenosis of the Godhead, ought we not to be most reverently slow, most cautious, most humble, in pronouncing against an inspired revelation of God, subject to certain wisely permitted limitations of human weakness, ignorance, and fallibility ? ”
—*Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration*, by Llewelyn J. Evans, p. 18.

That is to say: Just as we are entitled to hold that Jesus Christ by the Kenosis of the Godhead became ignorant, fallible, and weak, we must ig-

nore his teaching, even if He be called the God-Man, when he teaches anything which conflicts with the hypotheses of the Higher Criticism. This Kenosis will doubtless be referred to philosophers when they contradict the ethics of Jesus. We see no reason why Hebraists and critics of the New Testament should claim infallibility for Jesus Christ in all departments of thought except their own. And it seems impossible that the author of these disloyal sentences should have been familiar with the words of Jesus, spoken during His years of Kenosis and humiliation:

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” 1 John xviii. 37.

To those, then, who maintain that the Bible is the Word of God, and therefore infallible, these progressive Protestants make answer in substantial agreement with other enemies of Catholic Christianity. As an example, one may quote these striking sentences from Mr. Ingersoll on the one hand, and a Presbyterian authority on the other:

“Had we been born in Turkey, most of us would have been Mohammedans and believed in the inspiration of the Koran. We should have believed that Mohammed actually

visited Heaven and became acquainted with an angel by the name of Gabriel. . . . We would have quoted from the works and letters of philosophers, generals, and sultans to show that the Koran was the best of books, and that Turkey was indebted to that book, and to that alone, for its greatness and prosperity. We would have asked that man whether he knew more than all the great minds of his country, whether he was so much wiser than his fathers? We would have pointed out to him the fact that thousands had been consoled in the hour of death by passages from the Koran."

"Whoever reads our sacred Book is compelled to believe it, or suffer forever the torments of the lost. . . . We may disagree with others as much as we please upon the meaning of all passages in the Bible, but we must not deny the truth of a single word. We must believe that the Book is inspired."—*Mistakes of Moses*, by R. G. Ingersoll, pp. 36 ff.

Hence it is argued that the world is in slavery to the Bible, and that, being slaves to the Bible, they are slaves to superstition.

In like manner, we read in the writing of the progressive Protestants:

"The natural theory concerning an inspired book is illustrated by the Mohammedans. The prophet of Mecca, in his observation of Jews and Christians (in whom he recognized worshipers of the true God), discovered their Scriptures to be the source of their religion."

Then follows a description of the origin and execution of the writings of the Koran.

“The point I make is this: This is the kind of Bible we should like to have God give us, and when we construct for ourselves a theory of revelation, we do it along these lines.”
—*Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration*, by Prof. Preserved Smith, pp. 66, 67.

After this we are told that the Bible abounds in errors of all kinds. And it is added that, just as all Scripture is not profitable for doctrine, reproof and instruction in righteousness, so it must be affirmed that not all Scripture is inspired. Professor Briggs, from slightly different premises, draws a similar conclusion.

The statement found in so many Protestant writings, both here and in Germany, that the Jews were a barbarous people, that a large part of their history is not what it represents itself to be, that the mistakes are numerous—remarks which are to be found in the literature of infidelity since the days of Julian the Apostate, odd discrepancies, about which the humor and irony of Voltaire have played, are all advanced as if they were fresh discoveries. Indeed, Voltaire's commentaries on the Old Testament seem to have been the models for the popular writings of these Protestant critics. In the following passage is expressed with almost brutal frankness what in many of the writings of Voltaire is presented with equal irreverence, but in better taste

“The ancient worthies, Noah and Abraham, Jacob and Judah, David and Solomon, were in a low stage of moral advancement. . . . Doubtless it is true that we would not receive such men into our families, if they lived among us, and did such things now as they did then. We might be obliged to send them to prison, lest they should defile the community with their example.”—*Inaugural Address, by C. A. Briggs, p. 56.*

We have no desire to multiply quotations of this kind, but it is instructive to compare the last quotation with the following comment of Voltaire upon the incident of Hagar:

“*Si Abraham était un seigneur si puissant, s'il avait été vainqueur de cinq rois avec trois cent dix-huit hommes de l'élite de ses domestiques, si sa femme lui avait valu tant d'argent de la part du roi d' Egypte et du roi de Gérare, il paraît bien dur, et bien inhumain de renvoyer sa concubine et son premier-né dans le désert, avec un morceau de pain et une cruche d'eau, sous prétexte que ce premier-né jouait avec le fils de Sara.*”—*Genèse, by Voltaire.*

We may conclude this disagreeable but edifying task of comparing the utterances of progressive Protestantism with the teaching of popular and vulgar infidelity, by noticing the way in which the awful doctrine of future retribution is treated by Mr. Ingersoll and Professor Preserved Smith:

“Now I come to the last part of this creed—the doctrine of eternal punishment. I have concluded that I will never

deliver a lecture in which I will not attack the doctrine of eternal pain. . . . Think of that doctrine! The eternity of punishment! . . . And yet, according to the Christian religion, God is to have an everlasting penitentiary; He is to be an everlasting jailer, an everlasting turnkey. . . . And for what? For something they failed to believe in this world. Born in ignorance, supported by poverty, caught in the snares of temptation, deformed by toil, stupefied by want—and yet held responsible through the countless ages of eternity!” —*Orthodoxy*, by R. G. Ingersoll, pp. 38, 39.

“The doctrine of the Confession of Faith is that those who are not redeemed are, after the final judgment, consigned to the place reserved for ‘the devil and his angels there’—I quote now from the large catechism—‘to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of soul and body, forever.’ Now, sir, do you know how much that means? You know what the population of the globe is. Do you know that in every minute of time seventy human beings pass out of life? According to the most liberal construction of your theology, how many of those do you suppose are effectually called, redeemed, justified, and sanctified? Including infants and incapables, certainly not one-half. The doctrine of the Presbyterian Church is, therefore, that in every minute of time thirty human beings drop into that abyss of unspeakable torment, to be punished by the devil and his angels there, forever. Every hour an Assembly the size of this drops in that yawning chasm. . . . Do you face this awful problem of the destiny of your race? What do you do with it in your system?”—*Address delivered before General Assembly, 1891, by Prof. Preserved Smith.*

It is easy to see what Professor Smith does with it. He makes irreverent speeches about it. Before appealing to the Moderator of the As-

sembly to know what he did with it, he might have profitably turned to an English version of his Bible, and have discovered what Jesus Christ did with it in His system. In the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, at the forty-first verse, he would have read :

“Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

It seems to us that Professor Smith might with greater propriety have asked of the high Protestant court, before which he was speaking, not, What do you do with it in your system? but, What do you do with me?

If Presbyterians repudiate the doctrines of men like these whose writings I have quoted, it may be asked : Whether they expect their ministers to keep their vows, and why such men are permitted to give instruction in their seminaries ?

At all events, we begin to understand what progressive Protestants mean by “freedom of thought,” that “priceless boon of the Reformation.” They mean freedom for clergymen to disregard the solemn obligations of a subscription to a creed, and freedom to violate the laws of the Church to which they have promised allegiance.

Now, what we ask is this: If the Presbyterian standards are to be revised so as to be modernized, so as to fulfill the wants and conform to the opinions of the nineteenth century, why are they not sufficiently logical to repudiate the doctrine of their standards, so as to get rid of the solemn and essential truths of the Christian religion? These new opinions should be recognized by the revisers just as they recognize the growth of Arminianism in their Calvinistic Church. We say "new" opinions: they can, perhaps, be called new, because they have been presented by non-Presbyterian writers in almost every century of the Christian era. The answer which would be made to such an inquiry would undoubtedly be: "The Arminians have a majority now, and these progressive Protestants have not." Can such an organization be compared to the body of Christ, the "fullness of Him that filleth all in all"?

But they say, "We want a new doctrine of God." Their old doctrine of God is, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." That was good enough for the seventeenth century, but it seems that a new doctrine is wished for. Whether the revisers will give them any more than this, it remains to be seen. Perhaps the new definition

will be pantheistic or deistic. Or perhaps they will say that the nineteenth century has discovered that God is love. This definition seems so admirable to them because it is so scriptural. Occasionally progressive Protestants seem to be willing to disregard the "inductive" and "genetic" methods, and to stake their theology on a single text. The electric lamps of the nineteenth century are better than the oil of the first. The railway and steamship of the nineteenth century may be better than the stage-coach or sailing vessel of the last. Printing is better and cheaper in this century than it was in the fourteenth. The telegraph is better than the old post. But what about religion? What contribution to the doctrine of God has been made by the seers of our age? Shall we adopt the Hegelian doctrine of the Absolute, and teach our children the *Phenomenologie*? Shall we close our Bible and open the Analytic of Herbert Spencer? The reply will perhaps be: "No, but let us paste over our creeds an article of the Universalist belief, and, having enthroned in the skies a God with as little wrath against evil as Dionysius or Aphrodite, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

II. But another reason might be given, which, indeed, has been given, for changing the standards of the Presbyterian Church. We referred

briefly to it on another page. It may be urged that the old doctrines repel a great many who would otherwise leave a number of the Protestant churches and enter the Presbyterian fold. That is to say, because everybody will not accept the doctrines which you have promised to maintain, you had better give up your doctrines. It is conceivable that a social club, or a pleasant sewing-circle might find its rules unattractive to those who wished to become members, and should, therefore, modify or abandon those rules. But it is extraordinary that any religious organization which professed to have a mission in the world, the declaration of the truth of God, should accommodate that truth to the demands of those who have different opinions. Possibly our blessed Lord might have made more converts among the Scribes and Pharisees had He not denounced them. But He did not accommodate the truth which he had to proclaim, to the tastes or opinions of His opponents. And we are inclined to believe that it is the mission of His Church, not merely to fill the seats in religious halls with men who will pay a high rent, nor to attract those who fear the eternal justice of the Almighty by suppressing the awful doctrines which He gave His life to proclaim.

But we hear it said: "Don't put these doc-

trines into the creed; put only pleasant, cheerful doctrine into the creed." Of course, there are all kinds of creeds. Opposition to all creeds is a kind of creed, for those who engage in such opposition believe at least in their own opinions. There are creeds which may be sung; there are creeds which are hortatory and answer the purposes of a sermon. If it should be claimed that a creed should not be a precise statement of doctrines in their logical relation, we should be disposed to say that a creed should not be an apology, nor a liturgy, nor a homily, nor a sentimental rhapsody. We prefer the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian creed to the indefinite platitudes suggested at the Detroit Assembly. But then, what if the uncompromising severity of the Westminster Standards has been a stumbling-block to many who would gladly have become Presbyterians? If the Revision was undertaken in order that the doctrines might be made acceptable to a world which did not believe in them, then, if the doctrines of the Confession are founded on the Bible, they must alter the Bible as well as the doctrines of the Confession. We are told that our age desires a more attractive and less polemical statement of religious truth, and yet we venture to say that there has never been a time in the history of the Church when the dis-

inctive doctrines of Presbyterians encountered such wide-spread opposition as they do now. Although few of those who join the Presbyterian Church may be familiar with the doctrine of its standards, it is conceivable that such persons might prefer not to have the doctrines contained in the standards preached from the pulpit. Doubtless, a fear that they may hear them deters many from becoming Presbyterians. They join some Church which does not speak so severely about sin, which permits them to entertain the joyful assurance that the whole race of Man is redeemed, and that money given to foreign missionaries is thrown away; that the decrees of God are not His eternal purpose, but are uttered and recalled at the bidding of men. If there be many laymen who come to the threshold of the Presbyterian Church in this frame of mind, it is plain that Presbyterians make a great mistake in having such doctrines in their standards. It might even be well to go a little farther. There are, for example, atheists who object to the section of the standards which deals with the doctrine of God. There are Catholics who object to the doctrine of authority. There are Episcopalians who deny that the Presbyterian form of government is apostolic. There are Baptists who have a different idea of the sac-

raments. It is evident that the Presbyterian revisers anticipate a mission to all such benighted persons. Christianity preached to the Chinese or the Turks is not so acceptable as Buddhism or Mohammedanism. The Church is not the teacher of the truth of God. It is a market for the sale of religious wares. People no longer want the doctrines of Calvin. Why not let them have what they do want? A man has as much right to say what kind of religion he shall have preached to him as he has to say what kind of a coat he shall wear, what kind of food he shall eat. Let the theological tailors and caterers bestir themselves, and see to it that the unbelieving public has what it wants. It is the inalienable right of a progressive Protestant to have his religion in the fashion.

But what if it be the clergy which desires the change? They are the preachers, not the hearers. That is easily explained. The clergy have "changed their attitude." It is true that they all promised to support the Standards of their church. But instead of supporting them, here and there and everywhere, ambitious seekers after truth are attacking them. It may be true that orthodoxy in some quarters is dying. It is dying, not because of the attacks of its enemies, but of the treachery of its friends. It is a case of suicide, not of murder.

It is freedom which will give men the truth; it is not the truth which shall make them free. It is true that we have promised to support this system of doctrine, they say, but we shall have liberty even at the expense of our vows. It will make our consciences easier to decalvinize our Standards. We can thus cease to be Presbyterians *de facto*, but continue to be Presbyterians *de jure*. Then we shall be free to preach without fear our favorite ideas. The Arminians who are without will be attracted. And at the meetings of our sessions we shall point with pride to the flocks of men and women hurrying to join our churches because the "harsh" and misleading teaching of the Epistle to the Romans has been struck out of our creed.

III. Another reason which may be urged, and which has been urged, in the support of the Revision of the Presbyterian Standards is the desire for the unity of all the Protestant denominations. This is a somewhat higher motive than the supply-and-demand theory which we have just been considering. It is argued that in proportion as these denominations make concessions to one another as to the articles of their respective creeds, they will be brought nearer together, and by their organic connection will present an unbroken "front" to the Church of Rome on the one hand, and to

the unbelieving world on the other. Of course, if each one of these denominations concedes all that is desired by all the others, the belief common to all will be very insignificant. But, assuming that the changes to be made are non-essential—that is, assuming that Protestant Churches differ from one another on non-essential points, it would appear that such unity was most desirable.

Such a position, if defended logically, would lead to most grotesque results. For this is on the principle of Hegel, that if pure Being be identical with Nothing, all contradictions disappear, for Being has no qualities which are not possessed by Nothing. The Episcopalians, for example, would like to have all the Presbyterian clergy reordained by "historic" bishops, although it is conceivable that the Presbyterians might claim that they felt a little more confidence in the Roman orders. The Presbyterians would like the Baptists to agree with them that immersion is no more necessary to baptism than sprinkling is. We do not know exactly what the Methodists would like. But they might feel satisfied if allowed to keep their class-meetings, and their pastoral study of religion at Pitman Grove and Martha's Vineyard. The Unitarians would doubtless be satisfied if all tests of orthodoxy were abolished

which affected a belief in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The Universalists would insist that everybody was saved, whether he joined this ecclesiastical "trust" or not. It is argued, therefore, that if the Confession of Faith, or a new creed, can be arranged, omitting as much and including as little as possible, and if this can be presented to the other Protestant churches, there will be a millennium in the Protestant world. There will be a sweet and blessed relationship of Arminians, Calvinists, believers in the Church of Henry VIII., or that of Edward VI., followers of Wesley and of Campbell, Immersionists and Quakers. The Salvation Army captain will lead the ritualistic procession, and the Methodist exhorter will occupy the chair of Presbyterian Dogmatics. A long line of graduates of Union, Princeton, Chicago, Auburn, Lane, and Allegheny schools of theology will wait patiently at the door of the Episcopal Seminary at Alexandria, Virginia, for some successor of the apostles to lay hands on them, to give them the true orders, and to teach them the Nicene Creed, which will be revised after a few years by a committee, so as to avoid repelling those who do not believe in the Nicene theology. The key-note is in the words of Professor Briggs: "The Church of England is entitled

to lead." * All those grand monuments of theological literature for which the Protestant Episcopal Church of this country is so justly famous will be studied with interest by those who have sat at the feet of the Hodges, and Smith, and Shedd. And when this union is completed, the assault on Rome and Infidelity will be begun. St. Thomas Aquinas and Bellarminus will be refuted by the superior scholarship of those who have given up their theology in order to secure the orders of Seabury, and Onderdonk, and Doane. The attack on the pope will be led on by some valiant members of the Salvation Army, ably assisted by some one who has Episcopal orders, and preaches Presbyterian doctrine.

If there were less sentiment and more thought in the religious world, it would be seen that this extravagant picture is a correct representation of what would happen outwardly, provided the efforts of Protestants toward doctrinal unity were to be successful. Formerly, it was thought that polemical argument, logical statement, pious enthusiasm, and persuasive power would convince theological opponents that they were wrong. But now it is held that these weapons of a degenerate age are ineffective. Men must beat their spears into pruning-

* *Whither?* by C. A. Briggs, p. 17.

hooks, and with these attack, not their adversaries, but the creeds to which they have subscribed.

IV. Another and far more serious reason for Revision is to be found in the claim that it will make the Standards of the Presbyterian Church more in harmony with the truth of the Bible. We hold that if the revisers had engaged in this movement for this reason they would be worthy of more serious attention than those belonging to other groups which we have noticed.

But it is just this class of revisers for which we look in vain among the advocates of Revision. It is not the Scriptures which have changed, but the revisers themselves have changed, and even the most moderate of them seem to be partially out of harmony with the doctrines of their creed. The report of the General Assembly's Committee on Revision was presented by the chairman, the Rev. Dr. W. C. Roberts, at Detroit, in 1891. From the report, we may form, we suppose, some idea of the intellectual and rhetorical resources of the Revision party. It first presents a narrative of the meetings held by the committee. These rather uninteresting statements are followed by some remarkable passages, models of rhetorical elegance and logical

strength. There is a pastoral vein in this introduction, which shows that the committee has an eye to the beauties of bucolic life. And, withal, there is a sound as of the clash of arms, which may recall to some readers the *Fechtboden* of a German university, or a Parisian *salle d'armes*:

“At every session was displayed the glitter of the polished steel of the professor, as well as the practical judgment of the experienced pastor. The clear-cut analysis made by the skilled dialectician called forth no greater applause than the pathetic appeals of the shepherd to let down the tender grass of the Word sufficiently low to afford the lambs of the flock opportunity to feed thereon. The keen blade of the layman did as effective work as the broadsword of the clergyman.”* If one were permitted to wonder that this unusual display of weapons may not have hindered the process of letting down the tender grass for the lambs, an explanation forthcoming would possibly be, that these martial arms were employed simply in cutting the grass. For in the next paragraph we read: “Some, beyond doubt, will feel that the pruning-knife has been too sparingly used, and many will allege that not a few

* Report of Committee on Revision to the General Assembly of 1891.

precious limbs have been lopped off." * It is something of a disappointment to the reader to discover that those glittering and well-tempered weapons which had, perhaps, excited his interest, were, after all, only pruning-knives. One weapon, however, seems to have been prohibited in the meetings of the committee, for we learn that: "in view of the condition of things in and out of the church, the committee did not deem it needful nor wise to use the reckless penknife of Jehoiakim, nor, on the other hand, to spare passages that are unnecessarily harsh or misleading." * After all this grazing, fencing, and trimming, we can easily understand that "it has been, throughout, the aim of the committee to bridge the gulf that appears to lie between the spirit of the Confession and that of our Church in these latter days, and to relieve, as far as practicable, the presentation in our Standards of God's sovereignty with the rays of His love." * But this does not coincide with the view taken by their effusive brother, Dr. Evans. The latter had already written, and the committee must have been aware of it: "Our mummy is, after all, one only on the outside. It is to be taken as one of ourselves. This contemporary of the Pharaohs must be handled as a contemporary

* Report of Committee on Revision.

—say of Barnum, or Buffalo Bill. He must be arrayed in modern toggery, made to wag the tongue of him in our-own-day vernacular," etc.* But this, we presume, is what is meant by the penknife of Jehoiakim. Surely Jehoiakim is a man of boundless eloquence and refined humor.

But if the Confession is founded on the Bible, as Presbyterians claim, then it would appear, *ceteris paribus*, that there is a still older mummy which is partly responsible for the more modern mummy of the Westminster Confession. So we shall soon see, if we may be permitted to continue this confused imagery, the Presbyterian vine-dressers lopping off branches of the Holy Scriptures with a pruning-knife, especially should such passages seem harsh or misleading.

It is no part of our purpose to examine the specific points at which this Protestant creed has been revised. Whether they are improvements or not, it is impossible to say absolutely, for that will depend upon the point of view from which they may be regarded. It can hardly be denied by an impartial critic, that, considering what has been left unaltered, the changes made lessen somewhat the coherency and logical compactness of the symbol. And this position is taken by a very few theologians in the Presbyterian Church, but they are not

* Prof. Evans in "How to Revise."

heeded. It is claimed that they are either prejudiced and narrow, or that they are not abreast of the thought of the age. We do not care to pronounce any opinion as to either of these accusations. But it may be doubted, for example, whether the condition of modern theology justifies the feeble endeavor of the revisers to combine Arminianism and Calvinism in a single document. Take the doctrine of the divine decree: it cannot be softened; its harsh and misleading character cannot be removed by asseverations of the freedom of the will, nor by omitting the doctrines of preterition and reprobation, which follow logically from it. The reader who has been repelled by the last-named doctrines will be repelled by the first-named doctrine. Some may say, unless election involves determinism and reprobation, then why do the revisers introduce an apology and an explanation for the purpose of preventing any one from putting a harsh and misleading interpretation upon the doctrine? We may be mistaken, but we believe that this century is the one, above all others, when the idea of the Sovereignty of Almighty God deserves the most complete recognition in the creeds of Christendom, and for this reason it would have been as well if the Presbyterians had left the chapters on this subject untouched. The most

powerful attempts have been made by scientific men during the last half of this century to prove that Christians have fallen into a vulgar anthropomorphism in their idea of God. There is, of course, a sense in which Christianity must always be anthropomorphic, because God, according to historic Christianity, has become incarnate. But beyond the conception of the incarnation is the wider conception of God as infinite Spirit, which has never been more wonderfully emphasized than in this century. In other centuries, His love has been emphasized as much. In our own day, in theological literature, His love is sometimes emphasized in such a way as to interfere with a true conception of His holiness. But the other attributes of God have been so remarkably revealed by scientific discovery that religion has, in more than one instance, sat at the feet of science to learn something of the manifestation of the creative Will in Nature. But, so far from these discoveries being opposed to the high predestinarian doctrine of S. Augustine, they have simply illustrated, by a thousand lessons from Nature, the deep truth of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity in its oldest and purest form. Science has, at any rate, presented us with a conception of the universe, which is simply the conception of God's absolute sover-

eignty, in terms of pantheism or materialism. We should have supposed that the Presbyterians would have been proud to point to the agreement of their traditional doctrine of the divine decree as fundamentally agreeable to the philosopher's view of the reign of law, and the inexorable operation of the principle of causation. But, of course, if Presbyterians are forced to be on their guard against their Methodist brethren, rather than against the atheistic science of the time, they have acted wisely, even if they have made their position equivocal.

The same kind of criticism might be expressed with regard to the Presbyterian doctrine of the human will. Aside from the fact that almost every philosopher of importance in modern times has held to the theoretical determination of the will, the Presbyterian position with respect to the doctrine of predestination, whether freedom be asserted or not, implies that moral responsibility is compatible with the absence of freedom; as, for example, in the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and depravity. In these doctrines we are taught that mankind is guilty, not merely on account of his actual transgressions, but also on account of Adam's fall. If, therefore, the human family has incurred any of the guilt of

Adam's fall, then they are involuntarily responsible for the sin of Adam's fall. It seems, therefore, that the Presbyterians, by inserting such absurd explanatory clauses as we find in Section III., Chapter IX., have weakened the philosophical consistency of their belief. Leaving the divine element out of account, it is evident to any one who is at all familiar with modern discussions, that it is claimed by some philosophers that moral responsibility is not necessarily dependent on freedom; and the popular philosophy of the revisers is certain, in the end, to work mischief to them in their efforts to accommodate their creed to the latest form of thought.

These are only passing suggestions which we have offered; suggestions which are apparent on the face of the report of the Committee on Revision.

It may be urged that the revisers already have this enlarged idea of God, and that they are the leaders of a new movement in ethics and psychology in their narrow views of the will and moral responsibility. The Rev. Dr. Llewelyn J. Evans has formulated his idea of natural theology in his paper on Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration :

“ Ah, brethren, God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; his ways are not as our ways. The

designs by which He works are not patterns for patent-office purposes, nor pieces of diletante china decoration, nor æsthetic models in wax-work. . . . No, sirs! Flaws? Yes; but look at the plan, massive with the lines and the curves of the Infinite and Eternal. . . . Frictions? Yes; but look at the matchless correlations of energy, the actions of endlessly articulated forces, that determine the balancings of the dewdrops, and swing Jupiters and suns and systems along their vast, mighty courses. Discords? Yes; but listen to the eternal anthem, the Jubilate Deo, that rings from star to star, and ravishes the eternities." *

If this rather maniacal and chaotic description of the workings of the Almighty is the new doctrine of God which is called for, we prefer the definition of the Westminster standards.

Professor Shedd, who is, perhaps, the ablest theologian in the Presbyterian Church, has pointed out the fact that the revisers are about to destroy the historic Calvinistic distinction between "common" and "special" grace. But he has apparently overlooked the reason which has led to this change. It is to eliminate from the Confession the harsh and unscriptural view of the heathen world. We are informed

* Pp. 14, 15.

by the revisers that the Westminster divines introduced these severe doctrines because they had no conception of the vast number of heathen in the world. In the Epistle to the Romans, which is, after, all the main obstacle in the path of Revision, the Apostle Paul labors under the same misapprehension with regard to the heathen. It becomes an interesting question, therefore, How many heathen must be known to the makers of a creed, to determine whether a belief in Jesus Christ is necessary to the salvation of the heathen? The position of the revisers is like that of an astronomer, who should say: "If I had known that there were so many stars, I would not have concluded that they were so far away." It is as if a man should say: "If I had known how many negroes there were in the world, I would not have affirmed that negroes were so black."

But we have no intention of examining these changes in the Presbyterian Creed more specifically. After the revision is completed, after a new creed has been adopted, we shall take an opportunity of dealing with the result at length, and at each change of position particularly.

The same General Assembly which accepted the report of the Revision committee, and sent it down to the presbyteries for consideration

and amendment, disapproved of the appointment of Professor Briggs to the chair of Biblical Theology in New York. The Presbytery of New York had previously appointed a committee to prefer charges of heresy against him, and it seemed probable that the whole denomination was about to repudiate the doctrines set forth in the Inaugural Address.

But the Seminary rebelled against the General Assembly, and the disapproved professor resumed his lectures in the autumn. And then occurred one of those comedies of ecclesiastical law, which shows that theological convictions are often only skin-deep, and which shows, moreover, that the logical as well as the theological doctrines of Union Seminary have completely captured the minds of the Presbyterian clergy of New York.

At the time when the committee was appointed, Professor Briggs had welcomed judicial investigation, and had expressed his willingness to meet the issue, carrying the case, if necessary, to the Supreme Court of the United States for final decision. Throughout the summer, his friends spoke confidently of his ability to endure the ordeal of a trial, and triumphantly to demonstrate to the Presbyterian and Protestant world that he was right, and his opponents were wrong. One Presbyterian organ,

edited and published in New York, not only took this ground, but proceeded to enforce its arguments by high-minded criticism of the clergymen engaged in the prosecution. They were represented as pastors of poor mission churches, who could not hope to compete successfully against the wealth and power of their neighbors. It was implied that those who had been sent to preach the gospel to the poor would be triumphantly vanquished by the exponents of scholarship and representatives of wealth. It was argued that the leader of this new Protestant revolution was only too anxious to convince his ignorant brethren that he was right, and they were wrong. But when the time of trial came, Professor Briggs read an argument in his defense. In it he reaffirmed the doctrines of the Inaugural, and expressed his views in a modest and becoming manner with respect to certain doctrines which were attributed to him, and which he repudiated. Without giving their prosecuting committee a hearing on the merits of the case, the same presbytery which had instituted proceedings against the doctrines of the Inaugural dismissed the case by an overwhelming vote, in spite of the assertion of the accused professor that he stood by every doctrine contained in his address. They dismissed the case, practically,

because the accused pleaded not guilty to the charges and specifications. In so far as the Presbytery of New York is concerned, it would appear to an impartial observer that Professor Briggs has gained a well-deserved victory. He has made the great body of the New York clergy in the Presbyterian Church take the responsibility of defending the doctrines of his Inaugural Address, which he has not retracted.* What the higher Presbyterian courts will say to such an amusing farce remains to be seen. But, henceforth, Professor Briggs may claim among his adherents ninety-three presbyters, who approve the reaffirmation of his doctrines of divine authority, inspiration, authenticity, bibliolatry, redemption, prophecy, and the middle state. As the New York Presbytery is said virtually to control the Presbyterian Church, the presbyteries west of the Alleghanies will soon be heard retracting their criticisms of Professor Briggs's doctrines, because he has declined to retract those doctrines himself.

We mention this, only to show how idle the Revision of the Presbyterian Standards is. The standards are no longer respected. It would be far better to abandon their creed and make a new one. We can not help thinking that it is better to have no constitution than a

* See "Response to Charges," etc., by C. A. Briggs.

constitution which no one respects. This will be the probable result. The President of Union Seminary has brought the Presbyterian Church to its senses. His experience of "thirty years on Manhattan Island" has led him to denounce the lies and misrepresentations with which the whole Presbyterian Church has been "hounding this poor fellow."* It is time that this should cease. When the contributions of these country presbyteries to the boards of the Church are as large as those of the churches on Manhattan Island, they may venture to demand that the obsolete laws of their church shall be enforced. Until then, let them remember that the Presbytery of New York expects every man to do his duty. Let them read the list of those who voted to dismiss the charges against Professor Briggs. There they will find the names of those who are fighting the brave battle of liberality and Broad-Church doctrine shoulder to shoulder with the undaunted Dr. Heber Newton. The Union Seminary is no longer a Presbyterian Galileo, but is a star in the East. Let the wise men of the West regard its divine light.

This surrender of historic Presbyterian doctrine, as it extends throughout the country, will

* In an address delivered before the New York Presbytery, October 5, 1891.

make the issue more and more distinct between Protestantism and Rome. The position of Calvin and the reactionary Protestants has always been the most difficult one which the Roman Catholic polemic has had to encounter. It seems probable that the Presbyterian Church will finally abandon this position, and the Latin Church will be left to contend with progressive Protestantism, from which it has nothing to fear. In spite of injuries and reverses, the cause of supernatural religion is sure to triumph in the end.

We should perhaps be reminded that opposition to heretical doctrine interferes sadly with the peace of the Church. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." And when this unity is secured by the surrender of principle, it becomes still more good and pleasant for the victorious party. Of course, if the orthodox Presbyterians desire peace, and wish to be forgiven for their rebellion against progressive Protestantism, they have the remedy in their own hands.

Peace can always be had if one of the conflicting parties is willing to surrender. And we presume that the peace of the Presbyterian Jerusalem will be secured by an evacuation of the traditional Calvinistic citadel. It is evident that many of these progressive Protestants have

determined that the old idea of a "Church militant" should be abandoned. It is the office of the Church not to contend with error and bear witness to infallible truth, but rather to dictate, from motives of sentiment and fear, what man is to believe about God, and to exhibit hostility to the justice and severity of a Holy God by presenting, in an unauthorized manner, the relations of divine love to sin and human guilt.



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